

Documents on Diplomacy: The Source

Notes of a Conversation: Benjamin Franklin & Richard Oswald April 18, 1782

To make a Peace durable, what may give occasion for future wars, should, if practicable be removed.

The Territory of the United States, and that of Canada, by long extended Frontiers touch each other.

The Settlers on the Frontiers of American Provinces are generally the most disorderly of the People, who being far removed from the Eye & Control of their respective Governments, are more bold in committing Offences against Neighbours, and are forever occasioning complaints & furnishing Matter for fresh Differences between their States.

By the late Debates in Parliament, & publick Writings, it appears that Britain desires a *Reconciliation* with the Americans—It is a sweet Word. It means much more than a mere Peace, & what is heartily to be wish'd for. Nations may make a Peace whenever they are both weary of making War —But if one of them has made War upon the other unjustly, & has wantonly & unnecessarily done it great Injuries, & refuses Reparative, tho' there may for the present be Peace, the Resentment of those Injuries will remain, & will break out again in Vengeance, when Occasions offer. These Occasions will be watch'd for by one side; fear'd by the other; & the Peace will never be secure; nor can any Cordiality subsist between them.

Many Houses & Villages have been burnt in America by the English & their Allies the Indians—I do not know that the Americans will insist on Reparation—Perhaps they may. But would it not be better for England to offer it? Nothing could have a greater Tendency to conciliate! And much of the future Commerce of resuming Intercourse between the two Countries may depend on the Reconciliation. Would not the advantage of Reconciliation by such means be greater than the Expence?

If then a Way can be proposed which may tend to efface the Memory of Injuries, at the same time that it takes away the Occasions of fresh Quarrel & Mischief, will it not be worth considering, especially if it can be done not only without Expence but be a means of saving —

Britain possesses Canada. Her chief Advantage from that possession consists in the trade for Peltry.¹ Her Expences in governing & defending that Settlement must be considerable. It might be humiliating to her to give it up on the demand of America. Perhaps America will not demand it. Some of her politic Rulers may consider the fear of such a Neighbour as a Means of keeping the 13 states more united among themselves, & more attentive to Military Discipline. But on the Minds of the people in general would it not have an excellent Effect if Britain should voluntarily offer to give up this Province; tho' on these Conditions, that she shall in all times coming have & enjoy the Right of Free Trade thither unencumbered with any Duties whatsoever; & that so much of the vacant Lands there shall be sold, as will raise a sum sufficient to pay for the Houses burnt by the British Troops & their Indians; & also to indemnify the Royalists for the Confiscation of their Estates

This is mere Conversation-matter between M^r O. & M^r F. as the former is not impower'd to make propositions, & the latter cannot make any without the concurrence of his Colleagues—

¹ The Fur Trade

Source

The Emerging Nation: Foreign Relations of the United States, 1780–1789, Mary A. Giunta, Editor-in-Chief, pp. 341–342; Washington, D.C.: 1996

Clements Library: *Shelburne Papers*, v. 87, no. 1, f. 183-184 (C).